

January 9, 2007

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
EXHIBIT No. 6
Date 10 JAN 07
Bill No. 3B156

Senate Judiciary Committee
MT State Capital
Room 303
Helena, MT 59620

RE: Senate Bill NO. 156

Dear Committee Members;

My name is Karen Manternach and I live in Scobey, Senate District 18. I am writing because on December 19, 2003, at 5:30 am on a Friday morning, I walked into our children's room to find a 16 year old youth jumping out of our child's bed. Three years later, this is still hard for me to talk about. I am hoping that by sharing this very personal and painful experience with you, that you will change Montana laws that currently protect youth sex offenders from having to complete court ordered sex offenders' classes and allows them to hide in the general population once they reach the age of 21.

In our case, the youth was convicted of the crime and sent to Pine Hills Correctional Institute to complete a court ordered sexual offender's course and serve his time until he reached the age of 18. Because the law at this time does not require it, I am so thankful now that we thought to ask the county attorney that this youth's name be put on the state's sexual offenders' registry. Because the youth turned 18, he was released without completing the sexual offenders' class. Because of distance and the youth's lack of finances, the state official who tried to help him complete these classes was forced to cancel it. Now he walks freely among children and others and has even held a job that involved being around children and teens running around in bathing suits.

We live in a small, rural, area of Montana; an area where our children are "safe" to play and ride bikes without adult supervision. When a sexual offender is returned to our community, the chance of meeting his victim is very good. According to Montana law, it is up to the local sheriff whether he posts publicly that there is a registered sexual offender in our community. Our newly elected sheriff has stated that if an offender is at level 2 or 3 he would post their presence to the public, otherwise not.

I share these details with you to ask that you vote for Senate Bill 156. In our case, this youth's name being on the registry is the only protection I feel we have. At this time when he turns 21 his name will be hidden. Please, help us protect our communities from these offenders and change the law. I and other families depend on the information we obtain from the registry to help keep our children away from offenders living around us. I am not asking that these individuals be further punished, but that they complete the mandated sexual offender classes, and that their names remain on the sexual offenders' registry beyond their 21st birthday.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this problem. If Montana is the "Last Best Place" to live, then rural Montana is the "Last Safe Place" to raise children. You can help keep it that way.